The Poisoners.

(Cornhill Magazine.)

(Cornhill Magazina.)

The Gres which had wrapped the Phace do Greve in a crimson manile and nent Lavelsin and Lavigoreux to their last account had been burned out for many days. Not even the sahes were loft to tell the tale of the awful end of those two old nags whose polaon vinis had put 'o sleep so many scores of inconvenient husbands, unloved wives and pestering mistresses. But if the stake was now cool and inert, waiting silently and patiently for new victims to dovour,

materesses. But if the stake was now cool and inert, waiting silently and patiently for new victims to dovour, Paris had not forgotten the sensational story of those polson sellers. Had not their customers included some of the greatest in the land? Did not their trial bring to light in all its sickly terror the whole hiddeusness of this poisoning mania that was rampant throughout the length and breath of fair France?

And as though to keep the horror of their names and their history tresher in the public mind, Mile. Mollere had caused them to be placed in a play; "La Devineresse," the joint work of Thomas Cornellic and Devise. Altead; for three nights the theatre in the Rue Mazarine had been crowded to excess to see this play. The well-time! Idea of Mollere's widow was rain ng lives into the treasury with a myrry jingle that 'nade the Comediene du Role beland her enterprise and wisdom in unmanaured terms. On the third might of the president of the Chambre Ardente which His 'Majesty had endowed with such oxtroordinary powers for the detection and punishment of those guilty of the practice of slow poisoning."

I like the play," Louis XIV. grachously avowed to Mile, Mollere in the course of the evening. "And who knows but what it may do something to stay this ghoulish mania which seem to run river may up to the Troupe." "Or it may wipe out the Troupe." "Or it may wipe out the Troupe."

seems to run riot among my peo-ple?"
"Or it may wipe out the Troupe Royale." murmured the Councilor of State, who bated the players and en-vied the favors the King showered upon them. "These poisoners, as I know full well, are revengeful flends, and they will not like your play, ma-deme."

know full well, are revengeful slends, and they will not like your play, nuadame."

The King tooked displeased at this remark. Louis was in mortal fear of himself being a victim of the mania. At the English Court it was poison.

"Perhaps, then, we ourselves are in danger of their revenge for daring to punish them," he cried. "You frighten madame, monsieur, and do yourselves no credit by raising such fears."

M. le President went a trific ande, and paier still as Louis promptly turned his back upon him.

But Mile, Mollere's nature was too light and frivolous to be impressed by the gloomy forsbodings of the Councilior, and she, returned to her dressing room so mightily pleased with the King's kindness that she speedly forgot all about them.

The next evening she walked from her house to the theatre lelaurely and alone. The night was dark, but fine, and the air braned and freshened her. At the threshold of the theatre, as she reached out to open the private deemly stepped out of the shadow and thrust a note into her hand.

"Mile. Mollere," he said, and made to hurry away, but the hilt of his sword caught in her closk, and as some one within finns open the door the hight fell for an instant full on his face. A pale, repulsive face, with a deep scar on the loft check—that was how it struck her as he hastily anatched himself free and disappeared into helter and read :—

ed himself free and disappeared into the night.

In her dressing-room she opened the letter and read:—
"If 'La Devineresse' be played for two more nights Lavoisin will be revenged. There are those who will see that her name is no lorger revited. The King burnt her at the stake, and now you place her on the stage to withstand the fites of the mob's derivent from Boware's This is no light warning. In two nights you must have a new play, Mile. Moliere, or —"
The actiress blanched a moment, and convulsively grasped the arm of her chair; then she shrugged her shoulders and laughed lightly and scornfully.

As the door closed upon the departing measurer a tiny sigh of relief cacaped her, and she proceeded to make the toliet her part demanded.

With that sigh of relief her fears vanished. She slept as soundly and as peaceably that night as she had ever slept. She trusted implicitly to the dark and torturous machinery of the Chambre Ardente to protect her, and after she had despatched the letter gave the matter not a moment's further thought.

Thus it was that she leaped to her feet with an exclamation of surprise the next afternoon when a servant ambre Ardente. The new play of Pradon's which she had been reading was tossed asside.

aide.
"His name?" she asked.
"M. Dupin."
"He is without?"

"Yos, madame."
"I will see him at once, certainly."
"A moment later a tail, lean man, attired neatly in the soberest of colours, stepped into the room. He bowed and vaticed until the servant had retired. Sille, Mollere spoke first.

'You have come from the Chambre, monsieur, about the letter I sent?"
"Am I being played with, think yon, or is it a grave matter, M. Dupir.
He smilled somewhat sacenate lily, "There is no hoax about it, I can assure you. It is meant carrestive cought: of that there can be no doubt. But how the revenge will be attempted we know not. It may be that a servant will be brithed to drop some deadly cordial into your food, or that a letter your stronged in some powerful poloon—a polson that will permeate the pores of your skin upon the merest touch—will be sent you; or, again, it may be that open and violent outrage will be attempted. Ah, you shudder, madame, but you know not of the horrors which are taking lacked aby by day around us. The Chambre knows. This manin is apprending daily. No one is safe from rubtle attack. Death is lingering at our ebows all day long and in the most silent watches of the night."

If grew impassioned as he spoke, and his eyes ever and anon gilatened with excitement. But suddenly he controlled himself, and was cool and inscrutable a.: smilling again.

"You terrify me—oh, you terrify me—oh, you terrify me—oh, you terrify he he hands to her yess as if to shu out the frigittul vision his words had conjured up.

"Pardon, madame, but I only wish to show you your danger, and to impress

her hands to her syes as if to shut out the trightful visiot his words had conjured up.

"Pardon, madame, but I only wish to show you your danger, and to impress upon you the necessity to be watchful. However, I think you need have little or no fear. The Chambre has its hands upon your enemies, I believe, at this very moment."

She gave a little cry of delight.

"Of course," he went on, "the sacts course to adopt would be to stop the play at once. Will you do that ?"

"No, I will not do that," she replied, slowly. "It is too great a success."

"Could you, then, identify the man who gave yo uthe letter?"

"Xes—oh, yes; 7 can seo his face, his horrible face, now!"

"Well, then, you must help us in this way. After the play to-night go to the Place de Greve. You will be met there by one of our agents, who will conduct you to one of our secret houses in the Rue de Cainte-Crokz. There we have several men under arrest, and you must see them. Had the man a scar under the left eye?"

"Yes, yea—a deep scar. I remember that distinctly."

"Many men have such cears, but attill this may be the right one. You will come, then?"

"I will. I shall see you there, monsleur?"

"Yes. And, by the way, has any

"I will. I shall see you there, mon-sleur?"
"Yes. And, by the way, has any other agent of the Chambre called? You see, we work secretly, and hardly know each other's plans and move-ments."
"No; no one else has been."
"Ah! then au revolt, madame. To-night, after the play, in the Rue de Eainte-Croix."
And he made obeslance and went out.

HIL.

Mile. Moliere was depressed and nervous that evening, despite her inherent inability to take most things seriously. She thought of the words of M. Dupin and feared to eat, feared to go out, feared to stay at home, feared almost to look ardund, and yet kept continuously siancing rapidly and timidly over her shoulder. The customary hour, however, lound her, as usual, on her way to the theatre, thickly veiled and cloaked. She took quite a circuitious route, avoiding all the quiet streets, and mixing as much as she could among the crowd.

At the corner of the Rue Mazarine, in her haste, she rain into a drunken man, who would have turned upon her and struck her but for the gallant instervention of a passing gentleman. A crowd collected all in a moment, as crowds will collect, and for one brief instant she caught sight, smild that throng, of a frace that chilted her with fear. It was the searred, reptile face of the delivery of the threatening letter. She would have swooned but for the excitement buoying her up.

So the Chambre Ardanto could not have the right man under arrest after all. That was her first thought. Was he not uncaptured and walking abroad? What should she do? Perhaps, though, she argued, at she sped along, she was mistraken in the face. There were plenty of scarred visages in Paris, as M. Duplin, had said. She determined in the end, as women will determine—without a wast amount of consideration—to keep hor appointment in the "lace de Greve. But meanwhile, arrived at the therefre, she hastily scribbled a note, and despatched it to the Chambre. It ran thus:—"Have just seen in the Rue Mazarine the man who gave me the threatening letter—at least, I believe it was the man. I will, howover, come to-night to the house in the Rue de Salnite Croix as I promised your agent, M. Dupin, this afternoon."

IV.

The play was over, and the audience

rv. The play was over, and the audience had dispersed. The streets, softly lilumined by a nowly risen moon, were still and dest-ted. Mile. Moliere, velled and hooded again, walked swiftly in the direction of the Place de Grove. As she entered the square, recently so wild and Jurid with tongues of hungry frame—hungry for lurid fiesh—but now

so peaceful and beautiful in the delicate light, she espied a figure approaching

"Mile. Mollere?" he queried, in teon, low voice when he came near.

deop, low voice when he came near.

Sho nodded her head.

"Foliow me," he added.

They traversed a labyrinth of streets, and no further word was spoken until, a quarter of an hour afterward, the man rapped gently at a house door in a queer little side atvex.

"This is the Ruo de Sainte-Croix," he murmurel.

"This is the Ruo do mainter atom, he murmured.

The door was instantly opened. "Enver," he said, and madame went in, with her attendant at her heels.

The passage was pitch dark. She stood still, aftrighted. "Where am 17" she cried.

"This way—this way. "Its all right," soid a voice."

"On, is that you, M. Dupin?"

"Yes, 'tis I, madame."

"Thank heaven! I began to fear that I had been outrapped."

A hand took hers in the darkness and

ddmly "lighted room, half laboratory, half library.

"Pray be seated, madame," said Dupin, senially, "I think I've settled this aftair. The Chambre Ardente Innows what it is about Ha, ha, ha' I should think so! Have some wine first, madame, before you look on the rearred, ugly faces of the rogues I have manacled here. Bestdees, you must be exhausted after your walk, and possibly frightneed, ch?"

He laughed pleasantly as he joured her out some wine. It stuck her what a courtly, affable man he was.

"Drink," he said.

"Drink" he said.
She emptied the goblet at a draught, for in truth her nerves were all in a quiver, and replacing it on the table looked round at her host and laughted back at him with a well-assured confidence and galety. Dit as her glaber fell upon him her laughter ceased. She gazed at him first in wonderment, and then aghast. M. Dupin was glaring at her flerech.

you?"

It seemed another being, this vindictive figure scowling down at her.
Fate and gice played hide and sele, in
his eyes. He was transformed into a
veritable ogre.
And suddenly, as she stared at him.

measured tones, his teeth elenched, but his voice calim. "Let me tell you it was poisoned."

The actress jumped to her feet in unscharzed pante.

"Mon dieul Mon dieul" she screamed. "Monsieur, what can you mean? What have you done?"

"You will know all soon enough!" he replied with tautalizing precision. The poison takes the hours to kill. There is time to repeat the story many, many times." He paused a second, and then a sudden excitement took hold of him. "I am Lavolsin's son," he cried, "not M. Dupin, not an agents of the Chambre Ardente—Lavolsin's son, the order, "not M. Dupin, not an agents of the Chambre Ardente—Lavolsin's son, the order of the woman you have put into your cursed play. I love my mother, maidame. I saw her burn, friezio before my eyes, and I laughed—ay, laughed—laughed with madness and rage to hear her old bones crackle, to see her her old bones crackle, to see her her old bones crackle, to see her old fiesh take. And since then three who sat in high places have somehow died—died naturally, though suddenly. He, ha, hal—ded through me, through medicine, you understand? And now you will follow them. In five hours you will foll alteop never to waken, a. d no one can hely you were not safe end sound here, for I only know he middle with a frenzied delight.

And as he laughed a hand came through the silghtly open door and of a sudden snatched the vial from his fingers.

And as he laughed a hand came through the slightly open door and of a sudden snatched the vial from his nagers.

Then like a flash, in the twinking of an eye, three men dashed into the room. There was a flerce struggle for a moment or two. Strong men panted as though in the thores of death. But it was soon over. Pounced on unawares, the poisoner was readily secured and gagged and carried forth.

Then the leader of the new-incres stepped up to Mile. Mollers where she ayon the floor, prostrate and unconscious.

He chafed her hands and threw water on her forchead.

"What is it—oh, what is it?" she murmured in a white. "Where am It?"

"Drink this at oice." he rejoined.

"It is an antidote."

She put the botto to her lips and gulped its contents down.

"You have had a narrow escape, madame," her rescuer went on, supporting her in his arms. "Lucky it is you wrote to the Chambro Arfente to night and mentioned the Rue de Sainte-Croix. We were already on the track of the writer of the threatening letter, and we knew it was a trap when you mentioned our agent. Our agents, forsooth! But we let you keep the appointment you had made with him order to effect a capture. We watched you come into the house and hon we quietly went to work. We have taken five of them—two, madama—all in the net of concecting vile poisons, and to a lawyou have done the King some service."



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